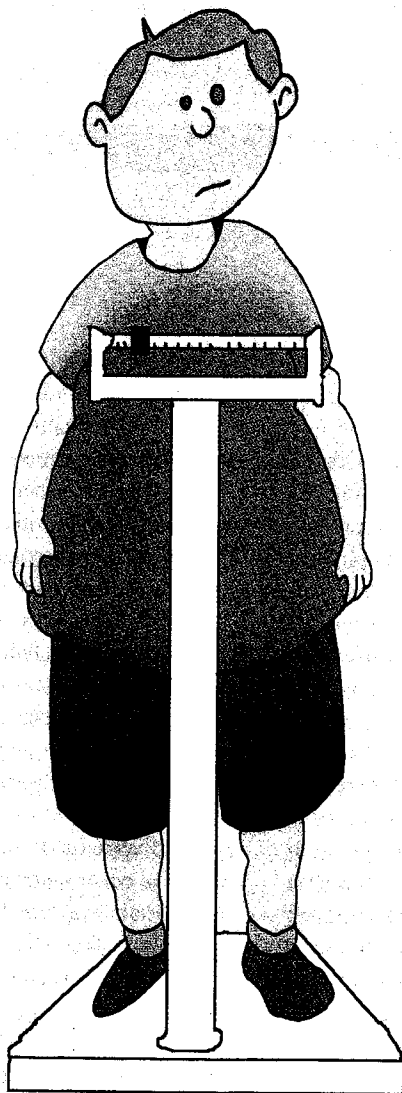


## SALT LIGHT

Winter is here, and cold-weather states will need lots of salt to keep the highways safe. But prices are running two and three times higher than last year, according to Stateline.org, forcing some states to make do with less. Many states used up their reserves last year because of a severe winter in the Northeast and Midwest. And this summer's heavy rainstorms, flooding and hurricanes stalled some Mississippi River barge deliveries. The lack of supply is causing the price increases. The need to be frugal is producing innovation, however. Pennsylvania, for example, is monitoring road temperatures using infrared sensors and then adjusting the amount of salt-water brine thrown on the roads. Ohio also is measuring road surface temperatures and using calibrated salt spreaders.



## TESTS DON'T HURT

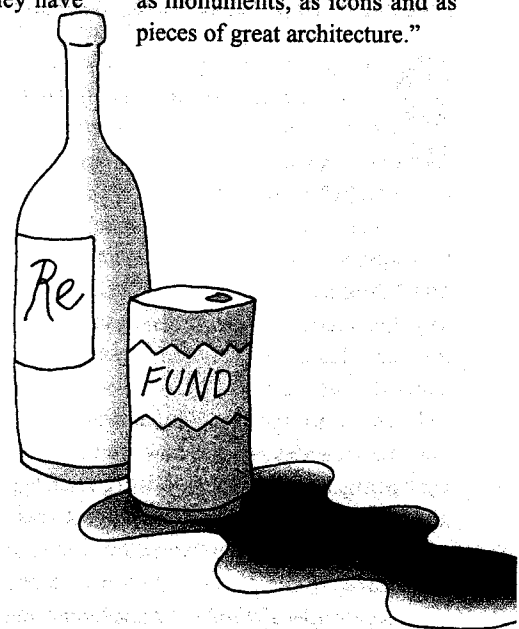
Arkansas became the first state in 2003 to require students to undergo body mass index tests. One in five school children is overweight in the state. Legislators and the governor loosened the standards last year, however, because they were concerned about overweight kids being teased and humiliated. Not to worry. A new study by the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences shows that overweight kids have not faced more teasing. The survey of 2,500 students found teasing to be at about the same level as before the tests were mandated.

## PARENTING CLASSES OK

The Connecticut Supreme Court recently upheld a state law requiring divorcing couples to take parenting courses. The justices ruled the classes do not represent any "intrusion on the parent's decision-making authority" and achieve "a compelling state interest by aiming to maintain familial harmony through a difficult transition." A parent had objected that the law does not consider whether a person already is a good parent and infringed on his constitutional guarantee of freedom of choice in family matters. "I'm a cancer survivor," he said. "I didn't need the state to tell me how to address that with my children, so why this?" The law requires parents to take the six-hour, \$125 course if they have children under age 18.

## BARN DANCE

Vermont is taking a census. Of barns, that is. Old barns. With funding from the Preserve America Program of the National Park Service, the state is making an effort to stop the decline of the historic buildings. No one knows how many barns are left, but they are disappearing rapidly because of the decline in family farms and the staggering cost of maintaining them. And many barns collapsed last year under heavy snow. "They're a symbol of our natural and agricultural past. We were a nation of farmers for generations," says Jim Lindberg of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. "They also are beautiful and have qualities that people appreciate as structures, as monuments, as icons and as pieces of great architecture."



## BOTTLE BOOTY

In the 11 states that encourage recycling with a refundable deposit on beer, soda and other beverage containers, fraudulent returns are sapping their profits. People are redeeming containers that were bought in other states with no or lower deposits. Big time fraud involves people driving into deposit states with flatbed trucks full of crushed cans. The practice has increased since stores installed machines to handle returns, rather than store clerks. "Smugglers are bleeding our taxpayers one can and one bottle at a time," Michigan Representative Steve Bieda told the Associated Press. He is sponsoring a bill to clamp down on illegal returns by making it a crime to return bottles in Michigan that were bought elsewhere and by retrofitting the machines to identify out-of-state bottles.